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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

WEDNESDAY, January 25, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "TIPS FOR FOOD SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A. and the Consumers' Counsel, A.A.A.

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To market, to market--and here are some hints to help you with your food shopping. Once again comes news of supplies and prices of seasonal foods from the Department of Agriculture.

In general the news is more food. During the first half of 1939 supplies of most foods will be larger than a year ago. You can look for more oranges, grapefruit and tangerines on the market; also more butter, cheese, eggs, poultry, better-grade beef, pork and pork products, and lamb; more canned string beans and canned peas; also more of most winter vegetables; and more cereal products, more flour, raisins, dried beans, peanuts and rice. But some foods aren't so plentiful as they were a year ago. These are apples, lower-grade beef, veal, canned tomatoes, old potatoes, nuts, dried prunes, dried peaches and dried apricots.

Maybe you noticed a drop in the wholesale price of eggs early in January. The reason? Record egg production for this time of year principally due to favorable weather and larger laying flocks. So the wholesale prices of top-grade eggs dropped sharply and more than usual. Weather conditions always have much to do with the price of eggs during January and February. Ordinarily, you know, egg prices are highest in November and then move down through April. Mild weather stimulates production and accentuates the seasonal drop. Periods of unusually cold weather, on the other hand, check production and also interfere with shipments to market. Thus cold weather slows up the seasonal drop or even causes prices to go up temporarily.

So much for eggs. Now some news about strawberries. Florida strawberry shipments are increasing. You can expect to see more berries on the market than there were a year ago unless unfavorable weather sets in. Most strawberries marketed during January and February come from Florida. During March Louisiana begins shipping. And Louisiana is the biggest single strawberry-producing area of them all. As the weather turns warmer other States begin sending their berries to market and prices go down until they hit bottom in late May and early June. Strawberries show their quality by their general appearance. Top quality berries have a solid red color, a clean bright look, and are free from moisture. They also have their tops or caps attached. Size is no indication of flavor in berries.

Speaking of seasonal fruits reminds me of oranges and grapefruit. They continue to be plentiful and relatively low in price. Shipments of grapefruit and oranges ordinarily are largest in December, January and February. Consequently, prices are lowest in this 3-month period. Because of large crops in recent years, prices have shown much less than their usual variation during the seasons.

In case you're interested in making the best buy in oranges, remember that weight rather than marketings on the skin is the guide to quality. The best single test--if you can't cut the fruit open--is to hold the fruit in your hand and see how heavy it is. Heavy thin-skinned oranges and grapefruit usually are juicy.

At this time of year the apples you see on the market come from storage warehouses. So prices generally are on the up and up. The warehouses have fewer apples in storage this January than they had last January.

That interesting vegetable which is actually the large bud of a plant related to the thistle--the artichoke is in season. California artichokes are now moving to market and seasonal increases in supply will be coming in until April or May when the shipments are heaviest. The bulk of domestic artichokes come from California where the season runs from November through May. Color is the best guide to freshness in artichokes. Fresh 'chokes are deep green. Those that are old or injured have a brownish color. Size is no indication either of quality or flavor.

Prospect for winter vegetables improved a good deal during the first half of January as the result of favorable growing conditions. So you can expect more new cabbage and spinach on the market. You won't find so many new carrots or early potatoes or so much new celery. The markets will probably have about as many snap beans and beets as they had a year ago.

Now a little news about butter. Butter prices have dropped back to the level which prevailed during the last half of last year. So the high point in butter prices seems to have passed. Ordinarily butter prices rise from June through December. But heavy milk production which resulted in heavy production of butter and other manufactured dairy products has kept butter prices well below their 1937-38 level and held back the seasonal price upswing.

A seasonal increase in supply and larger supplies than in 1938 are in prospect for better-grade beef during the first 3 months of this new year. Prices of better-grade cattle to date have failed to register their usual seasonal decline which gets underway in November. Prices have gone up and are higher than they were a year earlier. Small supplies of calves and low-grade cattle along with larger consumer incomes checked the usual seasonal decline in price.

That's all the food-shopping news today. More in a couple of weeks.

